

Sharing the View

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Follow me here – on yet another flight from San Francisco to my home airport in Northern California, something struck me differently. I was flying back from my first Interfraternity Institute (IFI) faculty experience when the pilot informed the passengers those sitting on the right side of the plane would have an EXCELLENT view of the Golden Gate Bridge. As we circled over Oakland to head north, I watched folks from the left side of the plane stretch to get a glimpse out the right side window. Those seated on the right side of the plane called out when the bridge was within sight. You could hear the sound of pictures being taken. On my row, the gentleman sitting next to me at the window seemed to take up the whole window. He took several photographs with a camera, then shut the blind and returned to his Bailey's on ice and the Tom Cruise movie playing on his iPad. I sat there thinking about how this was an apt metaphor for what I see happening year after year in the fraternal movement.

By no means was this my first sighting of the Golden Gate Bridge. The pilot clearly stated those on the right side of the plane would get the view, and I was in an aisle seat. The connection formed because my row mate didn't lean back to share the window with me or the folks on the left side of our aisle. He didn't share his camera after taking several photos. He just went about his own thing.

After working with the fraternal movement for over a decade, this is a similar pattern I see time and time again at Undergraduate Inter-Fraternity Institute (UIFI), LeaderShape, service trips, conventions, conclaves, institutes, conferences, and the like. The pattern here is we gather together for a week or so, and dream up promises, connections, collaborations, and programming initiatives that will share resources, space, and time to others outside of us so the movement can do just that, MOVE. Then, after mementos are displayed on office walls and connections are secured on Facebook and LinkedIn, we go about our business and do our own thing. At the events, we don't share, shift, or even look around for other's perspectives; we take from what is around us to improve our own individual experience.

For example, for years I co-facilitated small groups at the same campus UIFI experience, and every year, participants were blown away that their campus had four (or more) different councils and at the end of the week vowed to keep the fraternal movement relevant by collaborating together across councils. During the year, I would stay in contact with the students I worked with, as well as the staff, faculty, volunteers, and leads, and I would see an almost instant disengagement with the learning that occurred. We would all go back to our own thing. The next year's group would arrive stunned that their campus had four councils.

At IFI this year, I met some truly incredible and inspiring new professionals, staff, volunteers, fellows, faculty, and deans of a great experience. With Dot Group Pride and

shout outs coming from other Dot Groups from the past, there is a clear network of support that can be utilized long into the future. This is similar to my experiences with LeaderShape campus and national based sessions, as well as the regularly scheduled leadership trainings and organizational gatherings that occur over the summer. It is hard to include all issues and often underrepresented groups, and solid attempts are often made, and then after pictures, hugs, and follows, we all just go back to doing our own thing.

Collectively, we, within the fraternal movement, struggle to include four (or more) councils of organizations as well as those with headquarters and those without, campus based professionals, non-affiliated folks, and those without a background in higher education. In this struggle, people learn others have different experiences, strengths, and weaknesses they bring to the fraternal movement.

What would happen if, as this year rolls out, we do something different?

Take a second and reflect back on the conferences, trainings, in services, institutes, gatherings, or meetings you have attended and write down the folks who really taught you something new. Who introduced a new idea or concept you didn't (and maybe still don't) fully understand? Think about your small groups, or the people who facilitated your conversations, or even the brief connections you made at the breakfast just a handful of people attended. These connections matter because they are outside of your regular old way of doing things.

I spoke this year at IFI about knowing our own incompetencies and how this is more important than believing in our competencies. It is through these connections we can continue to learn, stretch, question, and develop our professional philosophy. Our professional network is as important to our own development in the work we do to develop students and new leaders. It is also up to us to stay active in our growing network to keep learning.

The networks and connections we establish when attending conferences, institutes, workshops, etc. must be nurtured beyond those experiences. I make an effort and pledged to identify with at least one new person at these type of gatherings and also to put real effort to remaining connected by finding ways to collaborate in the future. Serving as faculty serves as a great example of how if we each were intentional and genuine in our networking we can leverage our collective passion for advancing Greek life. To not do so is a missed opportunity we can ill afford if we wish to make real progress.

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Make an effort right now to make a note in your calendar to set up a phone date with these folks. Stay connected with this uncomfortability by sharing a coffee break or lunch over a video call. Do something different and this will encourage someone different to do the same.

What if we lived out the other 51 weeks from the space we found ourselves before we left our last great conference and got back to business as usual? We shouldn't have to depend on blocking off our schedules for a week at a time to get comfortable being uncomfortable. These immersion experiences are like an endurance sport, but they don't make up for the year's worth of exercise we need to do to stay healthy. Reach out, lean back, share the view on the regular and you just might get to see the view from another's perspective.

Jessica Pettitt believes we may not be perfect, but we are good enough now to try. To keep the conversation stirring, check out www.GoodEnoughNow.com.